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# Predictors of Conspiracy Believers

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# Predictors of Conspiracy Believers

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## Overview

- This study explores the role of demographics and its influence on an individual's beliefs for conspiracy theories in the United States
- Research Focuses On:
  - Examining if the same demographics predictors are applicable and implemented for multiple conspiracy theories
  - Conspiracy theories focused on are JFK's assassination and 9/11 attacks
- Applying previously researched predictors to the focuses conspiracy theories
- Using the Chapman Survey of American Fears

## Abstract

The lack of trust and transparency between many American citizens and the United States government. Conspiracy theories have been used throughout history as an explanation for events and situations that were carried out by the government without any credible evidence. However who believes in them? Using Chapman University Survey of American Fears, this paper will explore the predictors of beliefs in conspiracy theories, who believes in which theories, and whether certain theories are believed over others. The predictors being explored are age, ideology, the fear of financial uncertainty, education, and the media. In the case of this paper, the conspiracy theories being covered are John F. Kennedy's assassination and the 9/11 attacks. Additionally, there's a conception that those believing in conspiracy theories tend to be older citizens however, recently conspiracy theories have become a trending topic among the youth due to popular YouTubers such as Shane Dawson and BuzzFeed's Unsolved. This is important because one could begin to see a possible shift in those who believe in conspiracy theories. If the research display an association between the predictors and conspiracy theories, it will allow us to understand who believes in theories and which one they believe in. The expected result for a John F. Kennedy assassination conspiracy believer is over the age of 65, conservative leaning, with limited education, constant viewer of Fox News, and does not fear financial uncertainty. Whereas the 9/11 attacks conspiracy believer is younger, liberal leaning, achieve higher education, constant viewer of social media, and fears financial uncertainty.

## Hypotheses:

- H1: Having stronger partisan beliefs are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories
- a. Having the fear of financial uncertainty in the future are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories
- H2: Those who are less educated and younger are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories
- H3: Those who have a higher usage of social media for news information are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories
- .

## Data

### H1: Partisanship and Financial Uncertainty

Coefficients*						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.569	.103		24.913	.000
	Rqn6	.041	.036	.033	1.139	.255
	191. How afraid are you of the following events? Economic/ financial collapse	-.148	.029	-.149	-5.187	.000

a. Dependent Variable: 25e. The Government is concealing what it knows about... The JFK assassination

A note on the independent variable above: Rqn6 is the result of recoding the question on partisanship. Originally on a 7-point scale, the question asked, "Do you think of yourself as Republican, Democrat, or Independent?", 1=strong Republican and 7=strong democrat. Rqn6 is recoded to having a 3-point scale.

The results of the regression test indicates that the relationship between partisanship and the theory is not statistically significant with  $p < .255$ . However, the regression test does indicate the relationship between financial uncertainty and JFK's assassination is statistically significant with a  $p < .000$ . That said, financial uncertainty has a magnitude of  $\beta = -.149$  in the conspiracy theory of JFK's assassination. Furthermore, the R Square of this test is .023 indicating only 2.3% of the relationship between partisanship and fear of financial uncertainty is explained by the data.

### H2: Education and Age

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.054	.067		30.647	.000
	Education	.018	.006	.085	2.934	.003
	Age collapsed (AGE + AGE2)	.055	.021	.076	2.631	.009

a. Dependent Variable: 25e. The Government is concealing what it knows about... The JFK assassination

The results of this regression test indicates the relationship between age, education and JFK's assassination theory are statistically significant with both independent variables having  $p < .003$  and  $p < .009$ . The magnitude of the relationship for the independent variable of education is represented by .085. In contrast, the magnitude of age is represented by .076. That said, education has a greater impact of influence as a predictor for belief in JFK's assassination theory. Moreover, the R Square of this test is .013, in which only 1.3% of the relationship between education and age is explained by the data.

### H3: Media

Coefficients*						
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error				
1	(Constant)	2.592	.109	23.776	.000	
	8d. How often do you...? Watch Fox News?	-.048	.018	-.086	-2.706	.007
	8e. How often do you...? Watch CNN?	.011	.024	.017	.435	.664
	8f. How often do you...? Watch MSNBC?	.029	.025	.046	1.185	.236
	8g. How often do you...? Watch the local TV news to learn about your area?	-.055	.018	-.099	-3.052	.002
	8h. How often do you...? Listen to a talk radio show that discusses politics?	.033	.017	.057	1.924	.055
	8i. How often do you...? Read online news websites (such as Yahoo News or Google)?	.019	.018	.032	1.028	.304
	8j. How often do you...? Get news from social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook)	-.055	.016	-.105	-3.444	.001

a. Dependent Variable: 25e. The Government is concealing what it knows about... The JFK assassination

The results of this regression indicates the relationship between three of the seven sources of media and JFK's assassination theory are statistically significant. The three sources are watching Fox News, watching local TV news to learn about the area, and receiving news from social media. The magnitude of the relationship for the independent variable of receiving news from social media is represented by  $-.105$ . That said, of the three sources of receiving news information, social media has the greatest impact as a predictor for belief in JFK's assassination. Furthermore, the R Square is .034, in which only 3.4% of the media is explained by the data.

## JFK Assassination Records - 2018 Additional Documents Release

The National Archives is releasing documents previously withheld in accordance with the JFK Assassination Records Collection Act. The vast majority of the Collection (88%) has been open in full and released to the public since the late 1990s. The records at issue are documents previously identified as assassination records, but withheld in full or withheld in part. [Learn more](#) →

These releases include FBI, CIA, and other agency documents (both formerly withheld in part and formerly withheld in full) identified by the Assassination Records Review Board as assassination records. The releases to date are as follows:



## Findings

### H1: Partisanship and Financial Uncertainty

Those with stronger partisan beliefs are not more likely to believe in conspiracy theories. Any level of partisanship does not influence one to believe in conspiracy theories. However, greater fear of financial uncertainty is a predictor of beliefs in conspiracy theories. Financial uncertainty often comes from one's "lack of control" over things therefore, believing in things such as conspiracy theories help one feel empowered.

### H2: Education and Age

Education and age are both predictors for conspiracy theories, The less educated and younger aged are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories. However, for the belief in JFK's assassination theory, the coefficient beta for age is very weak therefore, it can indicate that regardless of one's generation, the theory is passed on from one generation to another.

### H3: Media

Different sources of media have different amount of impact of individuals for beliefs in conspiracy theories. Receiving new information from social media held the greatest impact for influence. That said, higher usage of social media does not make one more likely to believe in conspiracy theories.

## Conclusion

A solidified list of predictors for conspiracy theories is hard to determine. Some predictors work well for one theory while for a another is does not. The predictors found for JFK's assassination theory are higher fear of financial uncertainty, less educated, and moderate usage of receiving news information from social media. On the other hand, the predictors for the 9/11 attacks are fairly the same however age and education have more influence. Surprisingly, the predictor of partisanship was not significant in either of the theories used in this topic.

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